

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 COA-01 DLOS-03 EB-07 SCA-01 CG-00

DOT-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SCS-03

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R 281001Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8619

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 1339

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, KS, US

SUBJECT: PRESS COVERAGE OF YELLOW SEA INCIDENT

REF: STATE 44711

1. ON BOTH FEB 27 AND 28 KOREAN PRESS HAS GIVEN FRONT PAGE MAJOR STORY PLAY TO YELLOW SEA INCIDENT IN WHICH NORTH KOREAN FISHING BOAT WAS SUNK EVENING FEBRUARY 26. FRONT PAGE HEADLINES IN ALL FEB 28 PRESS CARRY FACT THAT USAF PHANTOM JETS WERE OPERATING WITH ROKAF DURING INCIDENT. EDITS HAVE CLAIMED NORTH BEING PROVOCATIVE TO CREATE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPHEAVAL IN SOUTH AND HAVE EMPHASIZED TENSENESS OF SITUATION. KOREA TIMES EDIT INDICATES THIS REASON FOR USAF ASSISTANCE.

2. FIRST DAY'S STORIES WERE STRAIGHTFORWARD ACCOUNTS BASED ON MND RELEASE THAT STATED ONE OF TEN NORTH KOREAN VESSELS WAS SUNK IN COLLISION WITH ROK PATROL BOAT TWENTY MILES SOUTH OF NORTHERN PATROL LIMIT LINE, "WHICH SERVED AS NORTH-SOUTH DEMARCATION LINE IN THE WEST SEA." ARTICLES, WHICH REPORT TIMES AND DISTANCES OF INCIDENT ACCURATELY, NOTE THAT ROKN CRAFT CHALLENGED TWO SUSPECTED SHIPS FOR IDENTIFICATION, CHASED THEM WHEN THEY
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TRIED TO ESCAPE WESTWARD, AND THEN COLLIDED WITH NORTHERN

BOAT IN SUBSEQUENT CONFUSION IN DARKNESS. PAPERS PICKED UP DEFENSE MINISTRY SPOKESMAN STATEMENT THAT THIS FIRST TIME NORTH KOREAN SHIPS HAD INTRUDED INTO AREA EN MASSE WHICH "UNDER CONSTANT NAVY PATROL FOR PROTECTION OF ROK FISHING BOATS."

3. FEBRUARY 28 PRESS STORIES WERE ALL BASED ON SECOND MND RELEASE ISSUED ON FEB 27. ASIDE FROM NOTING USAF PARTICIPATION STORIES REPORT THAT NORTH KOREAN VESSEL WAS BELIEVED TO BE 50 TON IRONCLAD BOAT ENGAGED IN ESPIONAGE ACTIVITIES AGAINST ROK. DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF COUNTERINFILTRATION COMMAND MGEN KIM YOUNG-SOM WHO HELD PRESS CONFERENCE AT TIME SECOND MND RELEASE QUOTED IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS AS SAYING "WE TAKE IT SERIOUSLY THAT NORTH KOREAN VESSELS INTRUDED FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO THE "TERRITORIAL WATERS OF THE ROK." MND RELEASE ITSELF STATES, "NORTH KOREA, KNOWING THAT IT WAS OUR TERRITORIAL WATER, DELIBERATELY VIOLATED THE NPLL..." (COMMENT: KOREAN LANGUAGE PRESS SPEAKS OF "OPERATIONAL WATERS", AND MOFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR YI SANG-OCK TELLS US THIS IS PROPER TRANSLATION. YI ALSO NOTED THAT MND STATEMENT NOT CLEARED WITH MOFA AND THAT NO ATTEMPT BEING MADE TO DEFINE TERRITORIAL WATERS.)

4. SEVERAL EDITORIALS THAT HAVE APPEARED HAVE BEEN STANDARD ATTACKS ON NORTH FOR CREATING TENSION IN PURSUIT ITS DESIGNS AGAINST SOUTH. KOREA HERALD EDIT IMPUTES "DESPERATION OVER FAILING NORTHERN ECONOMY" AS REASON FOR NORTH'S RECENT PROVOCATIONS.

5. COMMENT: MND FEB 27 RELEASE ON USAF F-4 PARTICIPATION WAS MADE DESPITE MND AND UNC PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS AGREEMENT THAT REFERENCE TO OUR AIRCRAFT WOULD BE DROPPED. MND HIGHER LEVELS, WHO FULLY AWARE STANDING REQUIREMENT TO COORDINATE STATEMENTS ON US FORCES, CLEARLY VIOLATED UNDERSTANDING REACHED AT PAO LEVEL. CINCUNC HAS REGISTERED STRONGEST PERSONAL PROTEST TO MND OF REFERENCE TO USAF INVOLVEMENT AFTER UNC PAO AND MND PAO AGREED TO DELETE ALL REFERENCES TO USAF AIRCRAFT IN THE 27 FEBRUARY RELEASE.

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6. ROKG PUBLIC AFFAIRS HANDLING THIS STORY APPEARS TO BE DESIGNED TO CONVINCE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS OF SERIOUSNESS OF THREAT AND TO STRENGTHEN RATIONALE FOR REGIME'S INTERNAL DOMESTIC POLICIES. PLAY UP OF USAF INVOLVEMENT ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE TO DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES, AND PARTICULARLY NORTH KOREA, CREDIBILITY AND CONSISTENCY OF U.S. COMMITMENT TO SOUTH.

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